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Refugee Reports

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FRESNO CITY/COUNTY INITIATIVES PROMOTE REFUGEE INVOLVEMENT

(The following article, based on a Refugee Reports visit to Fresno, California, in February, reviews several community initiatives that respond to the influx of Indochinese refugees in that area.)

One in every ten people in Fresno, California, is a Southeast Asian refugee. The city hosts a Hmong population of 18,000, making it the largest Hmong community outside of Southeast Asia. And more Hmong, perhaps as many as 4,000, are expected to arrive within the year. In a city of 280,000, about 29,000 are Indochinese, counting the "lowland" Lao, Cambodians, and Vietnamese.

The Fresno economy is sluggish, and local officials report an unemployment rate of 12 to 13 percent for the overall population. Around 90 percent of the refugees currently use some form of public assistance. Employment is likely to remain a problem for some time, officials say.

But there is another story in Fresno, beyond these dramatic statistics. It is a surprisingly hopeful one, told by numerous local officials, service providers, and community leaders, as they talk about a variety of cooperative efforts undertaken with and for the refugee community.

A Hmong Migration The Hmong began to migrate to California's Central Valley around 1980. From the mountain highlands of Laos, the Hmong had been allies of the United States during the Vietnam war. The communist victory in 1975 brought on their flight into refugee camps in Thailand. From there, Hmong families eventually were resettled all over the United States, from Orange County, California, to Providence, Rhode Island.

Some were drawn to Fresno by prospects of farming. Some were attracted by the warm climate, by the lower rents, by the more generous welfare benefits. Others simply wanted to reunite with family members.

By 1982, there were an estimated 4,000 Hmong in Fresno, and 12,000 by 1983. A federal study commissioned around that time predicted continued migration, noting that, "The economic situation is grim and

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social services are limited, yet there is a feeling of hope for the future in Fresno."

These feelings of hope persist for the Hmong, and for the refugee community as a whole. One reason for this optimism is the increased access to services that has resulted from a variety of recent local government initiatives. As a result of efforts coordinated by city and county government employees, and funded to a significant degree by local tax dollars, more than 40 Indochinese trainees are working as full-time or part-time employees in social work, income maintenance, recreation and community outreach, health promotion, and crime prevention.

"There is a lot of cooperation going on," said Debbie Tom Ramirez, associate director of Lao Family Community of Fresno, a local service agency. The city and county initiatives, she said, "have put about 40 extra people out into the community. With more people, there are more contacts, more access."

More Hmong Expected This Year But even with adequate access to services, cultural and economic adjustment takes time and money, both of which are in increasingly short supply, according to Fresno city councilman Rod Anaforian. He pointed out that the Office of Refugee Resettlement has proposed significant cutbacks in the refugee budget for FY 88, including sharp reductions in the period of time during which the federal government will reimburse localities for refugee cash and medical assistance costs.

Fresno is already the victim of an "unfair funding process," said Anaforian, that does not account adequately for the impact of secondary migration. Local officials estimate that 92 percent of Fresno's refugee population moved there from somewhere else in the United States. Additional budget cuts are coming at the very time Fresno is expecting an influx of up to 4,000 Hmong, Anaforian said.

State Department officials confirm that 8,900 Hmong will be resettled in the United States in FY 87. Of these, 4,400 will have arrived by the end of April. The remaining 5,500 are expected to enter the country in July, August, and September.

Voluntary agency staff in Fresno said they will resettle about 1,500 to 2,000 Hmong in the last three months of this fiscal year. Secondary migration could account for an additional 1,500 or more.

Tam Nguyen, director of refugee services for Catholic Charities in Fresno, said he expects to hire three or four more staff to deal with the increased workload. The agency has been resettling an average of about 200 refugees per year in Fresno, Nguyen said. It may get up to 650 Hmong in a three month period. "Housing will not be a problem," he said, "but employment certainly will be."

"The Hmong are going to be a big asset to our community," Anaforian said. "We are not going to say close the door. But we do need help from responsible legislators to give us the tools to do the job."

County Trains Refugees in Social Work, Income Maintenance In the meantime, city and county initiatives are underway, training refugees to meet the needs of the growing community.

"The refugees are our neighbors and part of our everyday life," said Ernest E. Velasquez, refugee coordinator for the Fresno County Department of Social Services. "Our programs are part of an effort to get them economically and professionally assimilated."

In the summer of 1986, the Fresno County Department of Social Services recruited and hired seven Indochinese student social workers, citing a "desperate need" for qualified bilingual staff in the social work service division. There were two each of Hmong, Lao, and Vietnamese, and one Cambodian. One Vietnamese left shortly afterward for a job in a local refugee program, leaving six to complete the rigorous training course.

"We have trained this group in more things than we do with our regular new workers," said Kay Campbell, training supervisor for the Indochinese Family Maintenance Project. The topics she listed included welfare eligibility, domestic violence and family problems, law enforcement and legal services, health education and outreach, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR), drug abuse, income tax assistance, child care, services for the elderly, and minority awareness.

"All the training is valuable," Chareune Sayaseng, a lowland Lao trainee who has been in the United States for about three years,

told Refugee Reports. "Most refugees are only familiar with the bottom line--welfare services. It's a very new concept that so many resources are available."

Campbell said that as the trainees have established their competency and visibility in the community, more and more requests for help pour in from hospitals, schools, courts, and from refugee families. "We have been accepted well within the community," Sayaseng said, "even though we're young. If we can help the people achieve what they need, they are pleased."

Several of the trainees told Refugee Reports that intergenerational problems were among their greatest worries for the community, surpassing even the concerns about continuing high rates of public assistance. "The elders have lost hope and the children are adapting so fast," said Kevin Kao Moua, a Hmong who has lived in the United States since 1976. "Parents see their children lost in a world of entertainment, rather than education, and they don't know what to do." He said domestic violence was often a consequence of parents trying to reassert their traditional authority.

City Funds Support Community Outreach In January 1986, the Fresno City Council voted unanimously to allocate $300,000 to the department of parks and recreation in order to provide community services for refugees through a decentralized network of neighborhood community centers. "The city's role is to be a coordinator and collaborator" with all the many different social, health, and educational programs serving the refugee community, said Fred McCray, deputy recreation manager and supervisor of the Community Outreach Program Extension (COPE) project.

The idea for COPE was born, McCray said, when a survey of refugee groups and service providers discovered that "refugees were not mobile enough to leave their neighborhoods" to take advantage of the services that were available. "Our job was to bring the services to them," said McCray.

COPE is now coordinating programs in five sites close to refugee neighborhoods. A staff of 25 part-time employees, including 21 Indochinese, provide information and referral services and after-school recreation programs for the children. In several sites, tenant-landlord groups have been organized to deal with housing problems.

The five neighborhood sites also provide space for other agencies to offer outreach services, according to McCray. Among the services that are currently available or being recruited are English language classes; family counselling; consumer and home management counselling; services for children, youth, and senior citizens; health clinics; and citizenship classes.

Policy Dept. Hires Indochinese Community Service Officers Seven Indochinese community service officers--five men and two women--are now working for the Fresno Police Department, according to Lt. Art Venegas, commander of the Community Services Bureau.

"They do a bit of just about everything," Venegas told Refugee Reports in describing his staff's responsibilities. "They interpret for police investigators, translate crime prevention pamphlets, organize 'neighborhood watch' groups, run workshops in the schools. And they're on call when they are not on duty."

Venegas called the Indochinese community service efforts a "totally decentralized operation." "We work out of the community centers, store fronts, you name it," he said. "The staff spends a considerable amount of time travelling."

Seng Cha, a 23-year-old Hmong, explained that community service officers are not "sworn" police officers. They have not attended police academy and do not carry guns, although they do wear uniforms. "My job is nothing to be afraid of," he said. "We do not get involved in violent crimes. Mostly, we are trying to teach Southeast Asians about the laws in this country."

Incidents of juvenile delinquency and petty theft do occur from time to time, but "that happens in every community," Seng said.

"I enjoy working with people in this job," Seng said. "I have been studying law enforcement at Fresno City College for two years. My goal is to become a regular police officer."

That goal is shared by Sabith Cheth, a 39-year-old Cambodian woman who works with Seng as a community service officer. The entrance exam for the police academy was "really hard for me," Sabith said. "I've failed it once, but I plan to take it again."

Most of her time is spent educating the community about laws in the United States and the role of the police department, Sabith said. She expressed concern at the increasing reports of juvenile delinquency. "Every week there is something, mostly petty theft, shoplifting, things like that."

"It's hard to solve these problems," Sabith said. "I try to spend time with the kids and their families. Sometimes I will try to get the Buddhist temple involved."

"I really like this job," she said. "They teach me so much. I am helping my community, but I am helping myself, too. I never understood the law before. Now I understand more and more."

Refugee Community Health Specialists Work with the County In the Fresno County Health Department, three nurses supervise a staff of eight Southeast Asian refugees who carry out education and outreach programs in the community.

"Our focus is on training volunteers in the community to make referrals, and to provide first aid and emergency care," said Pao Ly, a Hmong community health specialist. "We also translate materials on home safety, communicable disease, and mental health."

The Refugee Health Volunteer Project has been in operation for more than two years, according to Joellyn Hamaguchi, a mental health nurse who supervises the project along with a public health nurse and an environmental health inspector. "Our role is to provide basic health information to the community, and to help them learn how to access the system," Hamaguchi said.

"Through our community health specialists, we recruit and train volunteers to serve as key people in their neighborhoods for health information and referral," Hamaguchi said. With technical assistance from health department staff, the health specialists hold regular classes in apartment complexes, at the community centers, and in adult education programs.

Funding for the project comes from two sources. The three supervisors are on the payroll of the health department, while funding for the paraprofessional community health specialists comes from federal "Title XX" social service funds provided through the Fresno County Department of Social Services.

Hamaguchi said that a project is in the planning stages to hire and train four full-time community mental health specialists to provide outreach and case management to refugees in need of mental health services. These specialists would be county health department employees, she said.

"Our main goal is to make the service systems more accessible to refugees," said H.P. Spees, of the health department. "Part of the way to do that is to change the structures that serve refugees. Another way is to develop refugees as professionals and paraprofessionals within those structures. We feel we are doing both."

Refugee Programs Provide New Focus for City/County Cooperation One positive spin-off from the health project, according to Spees, has been the establishment of the Fresno Housing Coalition, which brings together landlords, refugee leadership, and representatives from local legal services, schools, telephone companies, and utilities to address health and safety issues in refugee housing. "The group confronts problems in landlord-tenant relationships, and also looks at issues like the maintenance and repair of appliances, weatherizing homes, and proper use of utilities," Spees said.

Other local officials and service providers speak of a new cooperative attitude. "We share each other's experiences in training," said McCray. "The different agencies work together so regularly that coordination and linkage are as easy as picking up the phone."

The deputy city manager for Fresno, Bob Quesada, credits the Central California Forum on Refugee Affairs, an interagency group formed in 1982, as playing "an important role in bringing everybody together."

Jonathan Rollins, chairman of the Forum, sees a particular need for cooperation as Fresno begins to prepare for the arrival of more Hmong this summer. "People are worried" about the impact of these new arrivals, Rollins said. "I don't know what's going to happen. We are concerned about an anti-refugee backlash." He said the Forum was planning several public education efforts, including an advertising campaign to provide information about refugees and to remind the people of Fresno of "our history as a culturally diverse community."

The history of Fresno county, Quesada pointed out, reflects not only cultural

diversity, with over 70 ethnic groups represented, but a pattern of special receptiveness to refugees. "We had Armenians at the turn of the century, then Germans from Russia. We see refugees as a long-term commitment," he said.

"Refugees are here," said Velasquez, "and they are here to stay."

Update

° Two bills designed to reunite family members who may become separated because of the new immigration act have been introduced in the House by Rep. Edward R. Roybal (D-Cal.). The bills, H.R. 1812 and H.R. 1813, waive the act's "continuous residence" requirements for spouses and children of those qualified for legalization, and for the parents of children who are U.S. citizens born after December 31, 1981, and before November 7, 1986. An aide to Roybal indicated there was widespread support for these measures in the Congressman's district, but little, so far, on Capitol Hill. The bills, which have no co-sponsors, have been referred to the House Judiciary Committee.

° Rep. Henry B. Gonzalez (D-Tex.) has introduced a measure, H.R. 1120, which would, in effect, "decriminalize" activities of the sanctuary movement. The bill protects from prosecution those who feel compelled by their religious beliefs to harbor and transport aliens they think are refugees. The bill has 16 co-sponsors and has been referred to the House Judiciary Committee. No similar measure exists in the Senate.

° A new office has been set up within the Justice Department to review asylum policy, according to an April 7 announcement by Attorney General Edwin Meese. The office, called the Asylum Policy and Review Unit, will have several functions, including analysis of human rights conditions in various countries, review of certain Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) asylum decisions, and training of INS personnel. The unit's training role could grow "if and when new asylum regulations are issued," according to Ralph Thomas, INS deputy assistant commissioner for refugees, asylum and parole. Thomas said INS has been operating under interim asylum regulations since June 1980.

The unit, which will be fully operational within 60 days, according to a Justice Department spokesman, will be headed by Dr. Roger Pilon, former director of policy at the State Department's Bureau for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. Pilon will report directly to the Deputy Attorney General. Formation of this unit has been under consideration for "several months," and was not prompted by the Supreme Court's Cardoza-Fonseca decision, Justice Department officials said (see Refugee Reports, Vol. III, No. 3). That decision refuted the administration's position that a refugee must prove a "clear probability" rather than a "well-founded fear" of persecution.

° On March 30, Thai authorities repatriated 20 Hmong refugees who had been smuggled into Thailand in an effort to enter Ban Vinai refugee camp, according to The Nation, a Bangkok-based newspaper. One of the Thai smugglers captured by the police admitted that each of the refugees paid an equivalent of $150 to be smuggled out of Laos.

In the same article, The Nation noted that about 500 Hmong families are waiting in Laos across the Mekong River from the Thai village of Pakchom for the right opportunity to sneak into Ban Vinai.

° In an April 2 letter to Rep. Stephen J. Solarz (D-N.Y.), the Thai ambassador to the the United States, Arsa Sarasin, urged the United States to establish an admissions quota for Hmong refugees of 10,000 annually during the next five years, according to a Solarz aide.

Recent Developments

SENATOR HATFIELD INTRODUCES INDOCHINESE BILL

Citing an "ugly, steady erosion" in the U.S. refugee program in Southeast Asia, Sen. Mark O. Hatfield (R-Ore.) introduced legislation in Congress on March 23 that

would renew U.S commitments to Indochinese refugee resettlement and protection for at least three years. The bill (S. 814), which has 10 cosponsors in the Senate, would transfer refugee admissions authority from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to the Department of State. The Hatfield legislation, the Indochinese Refugee Resettlement and Protection Act of 1987, would also set an annual admissions ceiling for Indochinese of at least 36,500 for each of the next three fiscal years.

Within the annual admissions numbers allotted for Indochinese refugees, the bill stipulates that at least 9,000 of the people admitted in a given year must have lived in refugee camps for at least three years.

In other provisions, the bill allocates $5 million for refugee educational programs in Thailand during each of the next two years, and $5 million for the same period to aid Thai villages that are near refugee camps.

An identical bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Chester Atkins (D-Mass.) on April 6. The Atkins bill (H.R. 1940) has 6 cosponsors.

Hatfield Criticizes INS Rejection Rates In a Senate speech introducing the bill, Hatfield was critical of INS's performance in rejecting up to 60 percent of the lowland Lao refugees interviewed earlier this year. Recalling previous instances of high rejection rates, Hatfield said that the "persistent INS processing problem...is directly causing a major diplomatic problem for the United States" in the Southeast Asia region.

"I believe that Congress can best implement its...foreign policy objectives by re-removing INS from the process" of determining whether to admit refugees into the United States," Hatfield said.

Refugee admissions authority was given to INS in the Refugee Act of 1980. The Hatfield/Atkins bill would only remove INS authority for the East Asia region. The other four regions of the world--Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Near East and South Asia, and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union--would not be affected by the legislation.

Bill Sets Minimum Admissions Figures For Indochinese Refugees The Hatfield/Atkins bill would establish minimum annual admissions ceilings for the East Asia region from FY 88 to FY 90. The ceiling for refugee admissions from first asylum countries would be set at "at least 28,000," and admissions from Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program would be "at least 8,500" per year.

The bill also states that 9,000 "long-stayers," people who have lived in refugee camps for at least three years, must be included in the annual Indochinese admissions. Figures from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) indicate that, of the 143,000 official residents of UNHCR camps in Southeast Asia, 72,000 have been there for three years or more.

The bill provides that the annual consultation between Congress and the administration on refugee admissions for the next fiscal year would be held "not later than May 1" before the start of the fiscal year.

Currently, consultations are held only a few weeks, or even a few days, before the fiscal year ends on September 30. Some observers have argued that, given this timing, the consultations process can do little more than confirm an admissions ceiling already established when the budget is set earlier in the year.

Refugee Protection and Assistance Underscored In FY 88 and FY 89, the Hatfield/Atkins legislation allocates $11 million for various protection and assistance initiatives in Thailand. For educational programs in camps along the Thai-Lao and Thai-Cambodian borders, the bill authorizes $5 million to be spent in each of the next two fiscal years.

An additional $5 million in economic support funds would go to Thai villages "within close proximity to Indochinese refugee camps," and $1 million would be allocated to train Thai armed forces to protect the refugee camps.

The bill, further, expresses the sense of Congress "that international observers and relief personnel should be present on a twenty-four hours a day basis at camp 'Site 2' in Thailand." Temporary home to more than 150,000 Cambodian refugees, Site 2 has been the subject of numerous recent accounts detailing the human rights abuses that occur after international relief agency staff have finished work.

MAJOR CHANGE IN SOVIET JEWISH EMIGRATION IN THE WORKS

In what could be a change with far-reaching consequences, the Soviet Union has indicated to two prominent Jewish leaders that Soviet Jews with exit visas for Israel will travel first to Romania, rather than to Austria.

This could have a major impact on Jewish refugee resettlement in the United States, as 90 percent of Soviet Jews in recent years after arriving in Austria have opted to travel to the United States or other countries, rather than Israel.

Morris B. Abrams, chairman of both the National Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, and Edgar Bronfman, president of the World Jewish Congress, met in late March with officials in the Soviet Union. Among other things, Abrams and Bronfman said that the Soviets agreed on the following points:

- Soviet Jews with exit visas for Israel will travel via Romania on flights to be established.
- All refuseniks and their families will be permitted to emigrate to Israel within a one-year period, except for legitimate national security cases.
- First-degree relatives may emigrate for family reunification within an established time frame. There may be flexibility within the framework of the current narrow interpretation of "first-degree relative."
- Cases of those refuseniks recently placed in a "never allowed to emigrate" category will be reviewed.

Increased Numbers of Jews Are Exiting USSR In March, some 470 Soviet Jews received permission to emigrate, a sharp increase over the 98 given permission to emigrate in January. The March figure was the highest monthly total since the end of 1981 (though still well below the 4,000 per month who were leaving during the height of Soviet Jewish emigration in 1979).

The apparent Soviet signal came amidst discussions between Israel and segments of the American Jewish community about the ultimate destination of Soviet emigres--Israel or the United States. Many American Jewish figures had opposed a request from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir that the United States not accord refugee status to Soviet Jews in a bid that would require them to settle initially in Israel (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VIII, No. 3).

The Abrams-Bronfman meeting was quickly endorsed by Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, who said in an April 4 Christian Science Monitor interview that the Soviet agreement to fly Jews directly to Israel via Romania "is the most crucial part of the whole story."

CONGRESSIONAL SUBCOMMITTEE, SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT CALL FOR TEMPORARY NONDEPORTATION OF SALVADORANS

On April 10, the Senate judiciary subcommittee on refugees and immigration voted 2 to 1 to forward the Moakley/DeConcini bill to the full judiciary committee. The measure, S. 332, would prevent the deportation of Salvadoran nationals to their homeland for up to two years while a Government Accounting Office (GAO) study is conducted to determine whether it is safe for them to return.

Salvadoran Government Favors Temporary Stay of Deportation Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon Duarte said that he has asked the United States to give a special concession to Salvadorans to allow them to remain in the United States. The Salvadoran president's remarks came in an interview on Salvadoran television March 10 during a discussion of the new U.S. immigration law. Duarte said he deplored the Immigration Reform and Control Act, and raised particular concern about the effect it could have on increasing the number of deportations.

Duarte said that the thousands of Salvadorans who might return as a result of the new legislation would create uncertainty in El Salvador. He said, "This will be very difficult. It will be very difficult for them, the people, and the government."

Duarte said that there has been no U.S. response to his request to the United States not to deport Salvadorans.

According to the Salvadoran embassy in Washington, D.C., increased numbers of

Salvadorans in the United States have been repatriating since President Reagan signed the immigration reform bill into law in November. The number of requests for passports at the embassy has risen from about 10-to-15 per day before the new immigration law, to 40-to-70 per day now. An embassy source told Refugee Reports that passports are requested not only by people departing the United States voluntarily, but also by people being deported.

In late March, Salvadoran Foreign Minister Ricardo Acevedo Peralta visited the United States and was reported by the Salvadoran media to have raised the issue with Elliott Abrams, the assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs.

According to Spanish-language radio Cadena YSKL on March 20, "Acevado requested of Abrams that a special exception be made to prevent the massive and disorderly repatriation of most of the 500,000 to 600,000 Salvadorans residing in the United States, or, if no exception is made, that more financial aid be granted to El Salvador."

Salvadorans Say Many Not Able To Return To Their Homes The Salvadoran embassy source told Refugee Reports that a new commission has been established in El Salvador to "look for a way for these people to stay in the United States." The embassy source said, "We are not in a position to help them upon their return. Most come from areas where there is fighting and can't return home." Not only are returned migrants prevented from returning to their homes, but also space is not available for them in displaced persons camps, according to the embassy source. As a consequence, the source said, most stay in the city of San Salvador.

Added to El Salvador's troubles have been widespread casualties and destruction caused by a major earthquake in October. Tens of thousands were reportedly left homeless, and job prospects for returning Salvadorans are dim. "The situation has gotten a lot worse since the earthquake," said the embassy source.

Study Shows Migrants Help Salvadoran Economy The prospect of a significant return of Salvadorans from the United States will have the effect not only of creating added strains on the domestic housing, welfare, and employment pictures, but also in significantly reducing the amount of dollars sent to El Salvador from relatives working in the United States. According to a Georgetown University-funded study by Rev. Segundo Montes, a Jesuit sociologist with the Central American Research Institute, an estimated one million Salvadorans living in the United States send home more than $113 per month, for a total of $1.3 billion per year. The findings, reported in the Salvadoran press on March 11, were based on more than 3,000 interviews conducted throughout the United States and El Salvador. Most previous estimates of Salvadorans in the United States have been in the range of a half million people.

According to a March 5 AP report from San Salvador, the current U.S. embassy estimate for the amount sent home by Salvadorans in the United States is $350 million, considerably less than Rev. Montes' estimate, but greater than the $268.2 million provided in U.S. economic loans and grants to El Salvador last year.

HONDURAS AND NICARAGUA NEAR AGREEMENT ON MISKITO AIRLIFT

Nicaraguan Miskito Indian refugees in Honduras who want to return home may soon be airlifted to Nicaragua if "technical tie-ups" can be worked out between the governments of Honduras and Nicaragua, according to UNHCR. Confirmation of the plan comes as evidence builds that non-Miskito contra forces may be active in northeastern Nicaragua--the traditional homeland of Nicaragua's Miskitos.

A State Department official, when asked about the potential danger of contra activity to returning Miskitos, said, "We've always chastised the Nicaraguan government for placing civilians in dangerous areas." But, he added, "Our main concern is that whatever is done is done on a voluntary basis."

Another Central American expert confirmed a report in the April 14 New York Times that non-Miskito forces were operating in northeastern Nicaragua, but was cautious in his estimate of their impact on repatriation efforts. "It's hard to say right now because it is such a recent development," said Juan Mendez, director of the Washington office of America's Watch. "I doubt that the contra force will have the ability to

disrupt life there and I don't think it will be decisive."

"I would take the airlift as a positive step," said Gil Loescher of the University of Notre Dame. But, "it seems somewhat surprising in view of the press reports of contra activity," in the area.

The first flight, originating from Puerto Lempira, Honduras, and arriving in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua on the Caribbean coast, could take place by the end of April. The airlifts have been under consideration by UNHCR for months as a way to avoid an otherwise arduous overland treck from Mocoron in northeast Honduras to Tegu to Managua and on to Nicaragua's Mosquitia area in the northeast--a journey of several hundred miles which can take weeks or even months.

"Up till now, UNHCR has been forced to proceed with a cumbersome repatriation. This airlift is a very welcome thing," Mendez said. "Our understanding is that many people want to go back but aren't allowed to by the contras." The airlift might provide a way around this problem, he said.

"Our concern is where are they going to be located after they land in Nicaragua," said Jason Clay, director of research and editor at Cultural Survival. "Will they return to their homes?"

"We've learned," Mendez said, "that UNHCR may place a protection officer in Nicaragua to oversee refugee repatriation in the country. We think the idea is warranted." The Nicaraguan government has not been prohibiting Miskitos from settling on their former lands, Mendez said, except in some highly dangerous areas. He added that the government has allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to establish relief sites all along the Coco River.

There may be between 15,000 and 25,000 Miskito Indians in Honduras, according to Mendez. UNHCR reports that they have been returning steadily from Honduras this year--850 between January 1 and March 20.

Current Research

NEW YORK INS DETENTION FACILITY FOUND INADEQUATE

A recently released study by the General Accounting Office (GAO) of the Immigration and Naturalization Service's (INS) New York City detention facility found its security to be "inadequate".

Although the Varick Street "service processing center" (SPC) was designed for short-term holding of a few days, the GAO found 83 percent of the detainees to have been held for more than 8 days; 49 percent, more than a month; and 18 percent, for 6 months or more.

Although the facility was designed for noncriminal aliens, the GAO found 67 percent of the detainees in April 1986 to have criminal backgrounds.

Criminal and Noncriminal Aliens Detained Together Particularly relevant to the safety of detained noncriminal asylum seekers was the GAO finding that "the SPC houses aliens in a dormitory-style arrangement whereby criminal aliens, often violent and with lengthy prison records, are mixed with aliens who do not have criminal backgrounds." The report notes, "Under such circumstances, noncriminal aliens are exposed to the risk of abuse, harassment, assault, or injury by those aliens with criminal backgrounds."

Disruptive incidents reported at the facility include physical abuse, assaults against other detainees and guards, smuggling of drugs and weapons, vandalism, escapes, and several riots and near riots.

The report pointed out that SPC detention officers have been cited for physical and sexual harassment of detainees, unauthorized possession of firearms, and fighting with other guards, among other examples of misconduct and inattentiveness to professional duties.

In addition to the INS detention officers, the facility employed guards from a contract guard service. They received no basic training in security or correction matters, according to the report. The report noted "lack of vigilance, gross negligence to duty, gross misconduct, and suspected collusion in detainee escapes" among the contract guard staff.

The report, Criminal Aliens: INS' Detention and Deportation Activities in the New York City Area, number GAO/GGD-87-19BR, is available free of charge (for five copies or less) from the U.S. General Accounting Office, P.O. Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20877.

CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES AND SUBCOMMITTEES WITH REFUGEE INTERESTS
ONE HUNDRETH CONGRESS

For each committee and subcommittee, the majority members--Democrats--are listed first. Minority members appear second. The first name listed is the committee chair (underlined); the first minority member listed is the ranking minority member (underlined). Areas of jurisdiction related to refugee issues are listed in parenthesis after the committee name.

SENATE

Committee on the Judiciary (includes oversight of the Department of Justice, including the Immigration and Naturalization Service; immigration and refugee matters)
- Joseph R. Biden, Del.; Edward M. Kennedy, Mass.; Robert C. Byrd, W.Va.; Howard M. Metzenbaum, Ohio; Dennis DeConcini, Ariz.; Patrick J. Leahy, Vt.; Howell T. Heflin, Ala., Paul Simon, Ill.
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Projects and Programs

EFFORTS TO CORRECT REFUGEES' ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION UNDERWAY

English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers on the frontline of the battle to teach English and acculturation for newly arrived refugees are generally preoccupied with providing basic grammatical pointers and enough vocabulary to enable their refugee students to find entry-level jobs. They might well respond with skepticism to the thought that they should also be concerned with modification of foreign accents. However, a growing body of specialists has begun to point out the importance of paying attention to pronunciation. They say it is necessary to achieve basic levels of communication and indispensable to advancement from the bottom rung of the American economic ladder.

Accent affects not only the ability of the foreign-born person to speak clearly, but also to understand the language as it is spoken by the native born. The accent handicap not only creates barriers to basic communication with obvious consequences for job advancement, but also undermines the refugee's self esteem. A former lawyer from Cambodia working as a custodian in a public library was confused and hurt because he constantly heard his supervisor say, "You bad." It wasn't until he finally spoke to an American friend about his problem that he learned the boss had been saying, "You bet."

"Some survival ESL courses are geared around a list of important words. But there is more to the language than those few words," said Virginia French Allen, author of the newly published The Sounds of American English (see Resources). "It is a snare and delusion to say with these 75 words you are prepared for a job."

Allen maintains that, while ESL teachers should continue to promote survival vocabulary, they need to be trained in the English sound system. Many students cannot learn pronunciation by imitation alone. "They need to be shown the vocal apparatus for producing sounds."

Judy Gilbert, author of Clear Speech, published by the Cambridge University Press, said that the influx of Southeast Asian refugees has helped to show that "pronunciation is not a frill, but a core need."

Gilbert, who started her career as an ESL teacher, said, "Most teachers are tired, harassed, and don't have much time. They fall back on the familiar." She said that those who approach pronunciation at all generally engage in drills of "minimal pairs"--such as "boat" and "vote." Gilbert maintains that the emphasis on individual sounds is an inefficient approach to teaching pronunciation. "Advanced students tire of drills and don't want to do things they think aren't worthwhile. A lot of teachers simply give up on pronunciation." Gilbert laments this pattern, which she sees as prevalent in refugee adult education. "Their work future depends on becoming comprehensible."

Betty Robinett, coauthor of the Manual of American English Pronunciation, now in its fourth printing from Holt Rinehart, said, "I'm not concerned that the non-native speaker learn to pronounce the perfect 'e' sound. Perfect pronunciation is not necessary." Robinett emphasizes intonation and stress as important to comprehension. "Correct intonation and stress allow for imperfect sound segments" so that while all the words may not be pronounced correctly, phrases will at least be adequately communicated.

Gilbert's approach is very much along the lines suggested by Robinett. Gilbert calls attention to what she calls the "musical pattern" of language. Many languages, such as Spanish, have a regular rhythm in which each syllable is given equal time. In English, however, not only are syllables irregularly linked, but sentences convey important meanings through stress. It is particularly difficult for non-native speakers to hear the lengthening and change of pitch that provide important signals of meaning. She cites the sentence "John," said the boss; "is stupid." and "John said the boss is stupid." as an example of how the same words can have quite different meaning depending on how they are spoken.

Gilbert uses several simple techniques to show pitch patterns. Using a kazoo, her students can "strip away distracting vocabulary" to reveal the pitch pattern of English sentences. She also has her students stretch a big rubber band as they say

English words and phrases to "feel" how syllables are lengthened and stressed. The change of pitch between the noun "record" and the verb "record", for example, convey different meanings.

Gilbert suggests that teachers should pay greater attention to having refugee students emphasize the critical word in a sentence and to be more aware of the language's "musically stressed syllables." Rather than emphasizing every word, as is tempting within the confines of the language classroom, Gilbert says that the way English is spoken is a system of contrasts, and that emphasis on every word muddles comprehension.

A local ESL teacher, Carol Van Duzer, of the Arlington, Virginia Education and Employment Program, said that ESL teachers at the classroom level are very concerned with the problem, but that to correct pronunciation is "a very slow process." She said that to stop and concentrate on pronunciation would be very frustrating for the students, who would not be able to see enough progress.

Donald Ranard, editor of Passage, a journal of refugee education, said that in ESL instruction today pronunciation is not taught explicitly, especially at the lower levels, but rather is acquired in the course of natural communication. He said that this is a departure from the earlier ESL "audiolingualism" approach, where different parts of language--grammar, vocabulary, the sound system--were taught in isolation from their real meaning. Now, he said, ESL involves fewer drills and stresses achieving competency "to get the message across."

Bruce Downing, an associate professor of linguistics at the University of Minnesota involved with the Southeast Asian Refugee Studies Project, said that despite the trend in ESL to focus on communicating in real situations, he believes that "there is a place for pronunciation drill in the ESL classroom." He pointed out that in the Hmong language, words are typically one syllable consonants followed by vowels. The final consonants in English words are very difficult for the Hmong. For example, Hmong find it almost impossible to distinguish tense in words such as "walk" and "walked".

Downing recognizes that with the strong influence of native language on pronunciation that "we have to create new channels of speech." He said that many refugee language instructors come into the field as "literacy volunteers," trained in neither ESL nor pronunciation articulation. "What is needed," he said, "is more professionals."

Speech Pathologists Take Interest in Refugees Recognizing that many ESL teachers are not trained in phonetics, speech pathologists have been showing an increasing interest in working with refugees to modify their accents.

Dr. Arthur Compton, director of the Institute of Language and Phonology, has trained hundreds of speech therapists in improving pronunciation skills for the foreign born. His program, Compton Pronouncing-English-as-a-second-language (PESL), is making significant inroads into the community of refugees and immigrants who have been in the United States for relatively longer periods of time and who have found accent to be a barrier toward career advancement. He has established a referral network of 350 speech pathologists around the country trained in Compton PESL. Referrals are made by calling 1-800-LANGUAGE.

Compton sees an important distinction between teachers and pathologists. "I have elected to restrict my training to speech pathologists because of their good, solid training in phonetics and in changing communication behavior." Although the PESL student does not have a pathological speech condition, the clinical skills of speech pathology help to identify problem areas and to solve them.

Wendy Fox is a speech pathologist in Falls Church, Virginia, who follows the Compton PESL approach. She says that her refugee clients are different from her native speaker clients with speech impediments. "These are who are more open to change." Fox said that motivation is an important positive factor for refugees. "They are surprised to learn they can change speech patterns. Once they do begin to succeed, they feel very positive about it."

Barriers Prevent Refugees from Getting Help Getting refugees to come forward in the first place for remedial language help

is difficult. Often the refugee is resigned to seeing accent as a permanent handicap that is not correctable. There is frequently a lack of awareness that anyone can help to overcome the problem. A Hmong refugee in Minnesota who had completed a masters degree in social work had such poor pronunciation that he could not get a job. Rather than getting specialized help on his pronunciation, he went for more advanced professional training. After the further investment of time, money, and training, he was no better able to get a job than before.

Another major obstacle is the cost of accent modification. Van Duzer said, "Sure it would be wonderful to have remedial work for refugees in pronunciation, as well as other areas such as developing reading and writing skills, but funding is the problem."

Although there seem to be no such government-funded remedial programs, Fox has been successful in convincing some employers to fund accent modification training for their employees. Recently, the American Security Bank enrolled 13 employees in Fox's program. Within a month of taking the course, 11 of them had either been promoted or reached their citizenship goals.

But employers are not universally receptive to language training for their refugee employees. "Too often," said Downing, "Hmong refugees are seen as good assembly line workers doing very mechanical tasks that don't involve communication. Employers are happy to let them stay at the entry level and don't see it as being in their interest to help them advance."

Resources

PRONUNCIATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH EXPLAINED

The Spring Institute of International Studies has just published a bilingual handbook in English and Vietnamese for speakers of other languages who wish to improve their pronunciation of English.

The Sounds of American English, by Virginia French Allen, features a numerical system (rather than phonetic symbols) to represent the ten vowel sounds of English. The author explains how the sounds are formed, how readers can determine the pronunciation of words from spelling patterns, and how to distinguish between sounds that are often confused by students of English. The book is designed to be a resource and guide for students working on their own or with a teacher.

The first edition is in English with a Vietnamese translation by Cao Anh Quan. Translations into other languages are planned. The book is available for $8 (plus $2 per copy for shipping) from the Spring Institute for International Studies, 4891 Independence St., Suite 100, Wheat Ridge, CO 80033. Tel. (303) 431-4003.

CROSS-CULTURAL TEACHER AND SUPERVISOR HANDBOOKS PUBLISHED BY EXPERIMENT PRESS

The Experiment in International Living has developed a six-volume series of training materials for working with refugee and immigrant populations. Based on six years of training refugees in Southeast Asia, the Newcomer Series includes five teacher handbooks and a supervisor handbook.

Each volume offers a competency-based curriculum organized into 30 to 60 lessons, ideas for lesson planning, and techniques for teaching language, literacy, numeracy, and cultural understanding.

The five teacher handbooks--Opening Lines (ESL), Shifting Gears I & II (pre-employment training), and Settling In I & II (U.S. cultural orientation)--are priced at $12.95 each. The set is available for $45.00. The supervisor handbook, Teaching Teachers, costs $14.95. For information contact The Experiment Press, Kipling Road, Brattleboro, VT, 05301. (802) 257-0676.

USCR ASYLUM PAPER AVAILABLE

The U.S. Committee for Refugees is making multiple copies of its recent issue paper on U.S. asylum policy available free-of-charge to groups wishing to distribute it. Contributions to cover the costs of postage and handling are appreciated. To request copies of the paper, Despite a Generous Spirit--Denying Asylum in the United States, write or call USCR, 815 15th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20005, (202) 667-0782.

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INDOCHINESE CASELOAD BY LENGTH OF STAY IN CAMPS (DECEMBER 31, 1986)

	HONG KONG	INDONESIA	MALAYSIA	PHILIPPINES	THAILAND					TOTAL BOAT PEOPLE	TOTAL
					Khmer	Laotian lowland	Laotian hilltribe	Vietnamese boat	Vietnamese land		
1 year or less	1,775	1,568	5,430	1,503	1,328	3,530	7,268	3,318	372	13,594	26,092
1 - 2 years	606	1,381	1,742	778	8,261	6,623	3,623	2,154	301	6,661	25,469
2 - 3 years	410	561	1,122	229	4,137	7,194	5,178	577	31	2,899	19,439
3 - 4 years	930	207	492	101	835	1,460	3,768	168	8	1,898	7,969
over 4 years	4,318	132	258	104	12,308	7,535	39,639	88	6	4,900	64,468
TOTAL	8,039	3,849	9,044	2,715	26,949	26,342	59,476	6,305	718	29,952	143,437

Source: UNHCR

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